

BIOGRAPHICAL SUMMARY: Ruby Uehara

"What are my thoughts [about the restaurant and bar business]? I have good thoughts. Working in a restaurant was – we were only little so we did things like washing glasses, drying the utensils. Later on I waited on tables, but I didn't find it hard work. I didn't think I was deprived or overworked or anything. Maybe, too, it's because I see my parents working hard. Today, they say you have to spend time with the children. You can't deprive them of this and that. But we didn't feel deprived. Everybody was in the same boat anyhow. All of the parents were all working hard. We didn't feel anything."

Ruby Uehara, second of six children, was born in Honolulu to Kana and Haruko Teruya. Her father, Kana, was a *yobiyose issei*. Her mother, a *nisei*, was raised on the Big Island.

Her family has a long history in the restaurant business. Her grandfather, Jiro Takara, and later, her uncle, Koen Takara, owned and operated a bar/restaurant called the Pink Elephant in Honolulu. Her parents were part-owners of Kaimukī Inn in the early 1930s. Later, they owned and operated Choice Inn, U.S. Café, and Lucky Grill. Lucky Grill continued under the ownership of relatives from about 1941 to 1960.

Ruby Uehara attended Kauluwela Elementary School and Central Intermediate School before graduating from St. Andrew's Priory. After school, she often helped at Lucky Grill.

A 1954 graduate of the University of Northern Colorado, she taught one year each at Hilo High School and Castle High School; followed by more than thirty years at Farrington High School. Retired since 1988, she and her family reside in Honolulu.

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ORAL HISTORY INTERVIEW

with

Ruby Uehara (RU)

Mānoa, O‘ahu

January 7, 2003

BY: Michiko Kodama-Nishimoto (MK)

MK: This is an interview with Mrs. Ruby Uehara at her home in Mānoa, O‘ahu on January 7, 2003. The interviewer is Michiko Kodama-Nishimoto.

Mrs. Uehara, we’re going to start today’s interview with when and where you were born.

RU: I was born on island of O‘ahu in Honolulu—I think was Kapahulu area then, from what my parents says—and was raised above Pink Elephant where my grandfather had his bar. They lived above, and we lived in the back of the house. So when Mom and Dad was working, my grandmother babysat us upstairs. What I recall so much very clearly is that when I knew my dad would be coming home about four o’ clock, I would skip upstairs so that I could stay with my grandparents (chuckles). I always told my dad, when my grandparents were here—that’s my maternal grandparents—I don’t think I’d be a Teruya.

(Laughter)

There were two uncles, two boys. One was eight years older than I, and one was ten years older. It’s the ten year older one who’s still living, that if I ask him he would tell me what he knows, what he knew. So that’s it. That’s my childhood.

And I think I went to St. Elizabeth Kindergarten that was in Kalihi. I know I went to some church school, and I think it’s St. Elizabeth. That’s it.

MK: You mentioned that you were living behind Pink Elephant . . .

RU: Yes.

MK: . . . where was Pink Elephant located?

RU: Pink Elephant was—in the old days, there was a whole street that went into Beretania so Pink Elephant was right on Beretania Street. You know where ‘A‘ala Park is?

MK: Mm-hmm.

RU: Close to there. There were old buildings there.

MK: Pink Elephant was what kind of business? A restaurant, a bar?

- RU: It was a combination. Mostly a bar. I don't know if there was a fountain also because I recall eating a lot of ice cream. I mean, I could have ice cream if I wanted it. Either that or the customers would give me coins, and we would go down only about five or six doors down and there's a grocery store where we would buy ice cream. And real interesting, in those days, you buy your ice cream bar, and certain ones will have either on the stick or a piece of paper saying you're allowed another ice cream for free.
- MK: And like you mentioned that there was a grocery store near Pink Elephant. What else was in that neighborhood?
- RU: Right next door or two doors down, there was a barbershop. And then, there was a gate to go to the back, and then there was a grocery store. And there was a road—I don't know whether it was 'A'ala Road—what road it was. It seems that was the heart of town at that time. There were other restaurants. Very interesting is—I think the name was 'A'ala Café, and that was owned by the same people that came from Okinawa as my parents. They were from Oroku. There was Toyo Theatre there, I think it was. Somewhere around there.
- MK: When you think back, what kinds of people lived in that area?
- RU: Mostly, the business was ran mostly by Japanese people. Even the grocery store was run by Japanese. The clientele, if I remember correctly, was merchant marines and all kinds of different nationalities that came in.
- MK: I know that you were really young, but what do you remember about Pink Elephant up to 1941 when . . .
- RU: What do I remember?
- MK: . . . when your grandparents went to Japan?
- RU: It was a small place, it wasn't very big and I think there was a fountain counter on the left. Wooden doors, folding wooden doors. Of course, upstairs, facing the street was an apartment that my grandparents lived in. In the back there was an old house. I remember the roof leaking when it rained. My parents used to put pots to catch the rain. That's all I remember. And then a long stairway in the back going up to the home, apartment.
- MK: And then I know that you said Pink Elephant was maybe mostly a bar, maybe there was a fountain.
- RU: Yeah.
- MK: How about the food? What do you remember about the food at Pink Elephant?
- RU: I don't recall anything about the food. So, I'm just wondering whether they served food or not. But I know they ate something. I don't know what they ate.
- MK: And then how about the workers at Pink Elephant? Who actually managed and worked?
- RU: My grandfather managed it. I remember him sitting there on the stool. I think my aunts—one of my aunts—worked there, the older one. And there were other hired girls that I didn't know.

- MK: How about your parents? Were they at all involved with Pink Elephant?
- RU: I don't think so, because Mom worked as a maid and my father worked as a yardman. And then, not soon after that, they opened Choice Inn. There was another bar. And you know, when they opened Choice Inn, I don't know what period it was, whether it was before or after Pink Elephant, but I have a feeling it's about the same time. Because Mom ran the bar or the restaurant. It was a combination of both. Dad worked during the day as a yardman. Then he would come after work to work in the bar.
- MK: Going back to your family situation, you were born in 1933 in Honolulu. How many siblings did you have in your family?
- RU: Okay, my older brother was born in 1932, I was born 1933, my younger brother was '36, then the sister was '37. Then 1946 was my second-to-the-last sister, '48 was the last sibling, the last sister. So between my sister and the second to the last one was thirteen years apart, and between the youngest and I, fifteen years. So they were raised a little differently from us.
- MK: So you're the second of six children?
- RU: Yeah.
- MK: What was your father's name?
- RU: My father's name was Kana Teruya. Mom was Haruko Teruya. Her maiden name was Takara.
- MK: I don't know how much you would know, but tell me about your father's family.
- RU: My father's family were not here. My grandfather, which is my father's father, was here much earlier and called my father over. And then after that he left for Okinawa again. So you know, I never met my grandparents on my father's side because they were all there [in Okinawa]. Uncles and auntys, the only time I met them is when they came over here to visit. We were kind of close because after the war [World War II], my dad helped them quite a bit to set up their own business and whatnot. So they would come all the time, about every two years or so to visit my dad. So in that sense, although we cannot communicate we have this pidgin that we speak, we have warm feelings for each other.
- MK: Your father, he was a *yobiyose* issei.
- RU: Yes. He would be a first generation.
- MK: What do you remember hearing about his early years in Hawai'i?
- RU: He worked hard, but it seems he had a nice time as a young man. He was on the Big Island working on a plantation. And somewhere along the line he acquired his own piece of land, and he had his own sugar. The young men, from what he says, would get together, and they would do kendo. They would have their own place. It seems he adjusted well.
- Then he had a brother, older brother, that worked on the plantation. I don't know if he came before Dad or what, but he worked there. He [also] worked for Dr. Matayoshi's parents, father. I guess they had their own hospital in those days. My mom did the

laundry so he got to know my mom, my uncle did. That's how my dad met my mother. It's my uncle that introduced them.

Then after that, my uncle left for Chicago and he went to a pharmaceutical school, and of course, he married a *Haole* lady and brought her back. Now, he was much older than my dad, which was very unusual for intermarriage in those days.

Then when he came back, he helped out. At that time, my dad had Lucky Grill and U.S. Café. I think U.S. Café was in partnership with my grandfather. When I talk to my aunty Tsune, she doesn't know. But when he came back, Dad gave him U.S. Café, and they were right across each other. The two restaurants were right across each other. So when the war came, both of them made money. They worked hard, but they made money.

MK: You mentioned that your dad gave him U.S. Café, by "him," you're referring to?

RU: To my uncle, Jimmy. I understand in later years he did give my dad—after the war and everything, he settled down, had his own home, had his own apartment—then he gave my dad something like ten thousand dollars for that. Whether my dad accepted it, I don't know.

MK: So your dad was a *yobiyose* issei who worked on the plantation. Later on he had his own parcel of land to work. I guess you call that a sugar contractor.

RU: That's right.

MK: He met your mother through his brother . . .

RU: Older brother, right.

MK: What do you know about your mother's family?

RU: My mother's family, I think, would have been very interesting, but I don't know too much. My maternal grandfather seems as though he was very good in business because he had that Pink Elephant, and he also had apartments. I know, definitely, one of them that was on Liliha Street, the government took over it. I tried to research that for my uncle and gave him all the information, but he never did anything about it. You know, to try to [recover their losses]. He thought it was useless to do it. It was taken and no money given, so something could have been done.

He also had leased a piece of property in Pearl Harbor. I remember going there, staying overnight in a shack, and I think they were going fish[ing], crab[bing]. I remember big Samoan crabs they used to get. I remember there having wired fence, and right there is Pearl Harbor. You can see the ships. So, I told my husband, "If my grandparents were here, I'm sure they would have been sent to the concentration camp [i.e., internment camp]." Because they had leased that Pearl Harbor, and I think the government during the war took that also.

There was a piece of property on Vineyard [Street] which was in my mom's name and which my grandfather owned part of it. They didn't take that because my mom was an American citizen. But the ones that were in my grandfather's name was taken.

MK: Your grandfather's name was?

RU: Jiro Takara.

MK: Do you know anything about his life prior to his becoming a businessman, a business owner?

RU: I don't know much except—and it's not a pleasant, a nice thing to say—but he had a stepmother. You know George's Inn? Richard Takara? Father and his grandfather are half-brothers. I think there was some kind of misunderstanding that's why he came here. But he was hardworking, and he had a good sense of business.

He left just before the war to take his two sons to Japan, and he left his children, female children, here. One was raised in Okinawa, and she came here when she was sixteen. But he took the two boys back to Japan to educate them. So they went to Waseda University. And the war broke out, they got stuck in Japan, and the American Café people—that's another [Ushi] Takara, but not me—they were there. They told my grandfather, "Let's go to Hong Kong and see if we can catch the last ship back." My grandfather didn't want to take the chance. But the [others] did, and they came back. So if my grandfather had done that, he would have been here. But again, if he was here, he would have been taken. I'm just positive he would have been taken because of that property he leased in Pearl Harbor. He would have been taken.

MK: When he left in 1941, it was himself and his two sons?

RU: Yeah, my grandmother and grandfather, and the two boys went.

MK: The daughters, who were they left with?

RU: My aunty Tsune and my aunty Masako Jean who lives in Mānoa, but she has Alzheimer's now. She's there. My aunty who was raised in Okinawa was here, and she married here very young. So my aunty Tsune says she never really got to know that sister because as soon as she came, *shimpai* marriage, and she got married. Interesting, really interesting.

MK: When they left for Japan, what happened to Pink Elephant?

RU: It was in partner with another family called Fukuji, I think, was the last name. He ran it until the two boys came back. Then I guess they rent it together or for a while maybe, I don't know. But I know in the end it's the two boys who owned that.

MK: In the end, when did the two boys come back?

RU: They came back—war ended what, '45? They came back about '46, soon after '46. My aunt sent penicillin because my grandfather had pneumonia. It got there, but they didn't know how to use it, the penicillin. Soon after, he passed away.

MK: How about your grandmother?

RU: My grandmother passed away early before my grandfather. I think she had cancer of the stomach or something.

MK: So it was just the two sons then . . .

RU: Came back.

MK: . . . who came back to Hawai'i. In addition to Pink Elephant, did your grandparents own any other businesses?

RU: Not businesses, but apartments. And that Pearl Harbor property was supposed to be for business marketing seafood, crabs, mullets, and whatnot.

MK: I know we got a little bit into your mom and dad. They met through your uncle.

RU: Mm-hmm.

MK: They eventually got married. What do you know about their early married life and work before they got into owning restaurants?

RU: All my mom talks about is my father taking her back to Okinawa to meet his parents. I don't know how he saved the money, but she went back there. That's the only thing I remember. That's the only thing they talked about.

MK: You mentioned that she was a cook and maid, and your father was a yardboy.

RU: Yeah.

MK: Where was that?

RU: Where was that? I know she worked for some families in Nu'uano because I would hear names of prominent families. But the one that I remember the best is Governor [Ingram M.] Stainback because there is a story to that. By the way, Governor Stainback lived in this back street in one of the homes. I think that was the home that he lived in. I remember it because when they ran Choice Inn, there was a lot of grafting. You know the liquor commission, the liquor inspectors came out. They taking a lot of graft. That was happening way back then, too, because my parents didn't know how to bribe. It seems that's what they wanted and my parents didn't know so they didn't get it, so they were getting real bad time to the point where they would have to close the restaurant, the bar.

When she worked for Governor [and Mrs.] Stainback, he wasn't a governor then. When they had that bar restaurant, he was the governor then. So as a last resort, my mom went to see him in the office. She said there were lot of desks that she got to go through. So when she told the secretary she wanted to see the governor, and I don't know what she said, but the governor came right out of his door and said, "Haruko, you come." Just like that. So she went, and she told him the problem that she was having in her business. She said from then on, no inspector gave her problem. No problem at all. That's why I remember Governor Stainback so well because she told us this story. She says when she thinks about, it was bribe. They wanted some bribe, but mom and dad just didn't know how to do it or what it was all about.

MK: I just realized that your mom, she was a *nisei*.

RU: She was a *nisei* so she spoke English. It's really to our disadvantage, because between she and my dad, they would speak Japanese, and to us she would speak completely English. When Dad's friend came, between Dad and his friends, [they spoke] *hogen*, completely Okinawan. Very different from Japanese, completely, totally different. But mom understood [Japanese and] Okinawan, too, because her parents they lived on the Big Island, *issei* [spoke] mostly Okinawan, so she understood Okinawan. I'm sure she understood my father's friends when they came.

- MK: In terms of background, are both the maternal and paternal sides of your family from Oroku?
- RU: Yes, yes, both. I don't know very fortunate or what, but both my husband's and my parents are from Oroku, also. So both parents were so happy, and they got along really well. (MK laughs.) They have really warm spot for each other. My husband comes from a family of nine siblings. All of them were so nice. They were really nice people. They really got along. They treated me real nicely.
- MK: Your mother being nisei, what did you hear about her growing-up years in Hawai'i?
- RU: She said she was a tomboy. She climbed mango trees, palm trees, fought with the boys. (Laughs) She gone on the mango tree, shake the branches, get the mangoes down. She must have had a grand time, but she said she was a tomboy.
- MK: She grew up in what town?
- RU: I think was Hakalau.
- MK: Hakalau.
- RU: Yeah. They talked about Chin Chaku Camp and whatnot.
- MK: In terms of education, what kind of education did she have?
- RU: I think she went up through the eighth grade. I think my dad went up only through the third grade. Must have been more because he read Japanese, and he could write Japanese. Typical Japanese education, but he knew his ABCs and phonetically he could read. Very haltingly. But to us was pidgin. Spoke part Japanese, Hawaiian, English. Real pidgin. You folks don't know what pidgin is.
- MK: And then, your mom, of course, spoke English . . .
- RU: And Japanese.
- MK: And understood some Okinawan, too.
- RU: Yeah, but she never spoke it though. She never spoke Okinawan.
- MK: So, your mom was raised in Hakalau, but her family eventually moved to Honolulu where they owned the Pink Elephant. So, she also spent part of her, I guess, young adulthood in Honolulu then.
- RU: I think so. Yeah. Although I think she got married—I don't know where she got married. I have her eulogy, so if I look it up, it would say. She was born here, I think they were 'Ewa Plantation [Company]. I think they went on strike [so] they lived at the Kobayashi Hotel for a while and then went to the Big Island. My grandparents, they were there.
- MK: When your dad and mom met on the Big Island, was that in the Hakalau area or Hilo area? Because you mentioned something about . . .
- RU: I really don't know. Dad, one year, he told me make sure to go see the Volcano House because he worked there. He worked there as a dishwasher or something. So I don't

know when that period whether he was working plantation part-time, I don't know. But he worked at the Volcano House for a while.

MK: So prior to their entering the restaurant business on their own then, your mom and dad, they did have some experience in . . .

RU: My mom had experience because of her father. They had that Pink Elephant. But my father, I don't know. All I know is, he did work at the Volcano House as a dishwasher.

MK: Would you know about when they came to Honolulu, your mom and dad?

RU: I don't know. All I know is that when they came, they all lived on John 'Ena Road in Waikīkī area. I remember recalling them say that. I guess a lot of their friends, Oroku people, lived there, too.

MK: I interviewed Masaji Uyehara, and when we interviewed Margaret Uyehara, both of them, maybe at slightly different times, lived on John 'Ena Road on Magoon property. I know Masaji's family lived on Magoon property. But Margaret Uyehara, I'm not sure if it was Magoon property or not.

RU: Interesting.

MK: That area. I guess that's *tokoromono*. Maybe they helped each other out when they came to Honolulu.

RU: Yeah.

MK: So the first restaurant that your parents were associated with here in Honolulu, other than Pink Elephant, was Kaimukī Inn?

RU: Must be Kaimukī Inn, because I don't recall anything about Kaimukī Inn, only hearsay. But Choice Inn, I remember. So must have been before that.

MK: You were saying over the phone before that, from what you heard, they were maybe partners in Kaimukī Inn for a short period of time.

RU: Yeah. For a short . . .

MK: . . . short period of time in the early [19]30s.

RU: In that early part of their ownership. Early part of the Kaimukī Inn's history.

MK: The one that you do remember is Choice Inn.

RU: Yeah.

MK: So, Choice Inn, which was in operation maybe from 1936 to about 1941.

RU: Somewhere around there, yeah.

MK: Where was it located?

- RU: It was almost on the corner of River and Beretania. I think I see that building, but I'm not sure. It's a corner, and it's second from the corner. That's all I remember. I remember having dinners, Chinese dinner, because just a block away, all the Chinese restaurants would be Maunakea Street, all that area. I remember once in a while having Chinese dinner, and we would have dinner in the back of Choice Inn.
- MK: So, it was a takeout that you would get from the . . .
- RU: Yeah, somebody must have gone and got the food. Once in a while, not always.
- MK: At Choice Inn, what did your mom and dad do? What were their roles with Choice Inn?
- RU: Mom was waiter, cook, whatever had to be done. She was always there. Dad would go out and work and come out in the evening. So I guess he was just like the bouncer or something. Or do janitorial work after that. That's about it.
- MK: So at that time, your dad had two jobs then?
- RU: Yeah, they worked all the time. Talk about being deprived, we were all deprived, but we were happy. There weren't such thing as welfare. You helped your relatives out. I remember one of my relatives living with us for almost a year until they bought their own home.
- MK: So at the time that your parents had Choice Inn, your mom was sort of running the restaurant and bar.
- RU: Yes, because all business transaction had to be done by my mom because she spoke and read English, understood. Dad didn't know.
- MK: Who else worked at Choice Inn?
- RU: They hired people. Just my parents and then they had girls hired.
- MK: Would you recall what types of people came to Choice Inn?
- RU: I think it was mostly all local people. All different nationalities.
- MK: Since it was a restaurant/bar, what kinds of food did your mom . . .
- RU: I don't recall any food, so my husband saying probably was completely a bar. But I was old enough to remember because I worked in Lucky Grill. That, I remember.
- MK: How about this Lucky Grill? Where was it located?
- RU: You know where Liberty House is?
- MK: Yeah.
- RU: Part of Liberty House toward Hotel Street was Lucky Grill. That was on Bethel Street side.
- MK: What kind of business was Lucky Grill?

RU: Lucky Grill was totally restaurant. It was restaurant. No liquor.

MK: What kind of food did . . .

RU: American food. Hamburger steak, spaghetti, veal cutlets. What else do I remember? Steaks. We had a soda fountain on the side. Hamburger steak, I remember, was fifty cents. You have rice, you had little vegetables, you had a choice of soup or fruit cocktail, and was homemade soup. You had two pieces of bread, and butter with it, or later on, we had two pieces of rolls with butter. What else? You had a choice of iced tea, orangeade, or coffee, or tea. All for fifty cents.

MK: For fifty cents.

RU: Then for seventy-five cents, you had combination. We had hamburger with spaghetti, that was seventy-five cents, and you had all the other stuff that go with it. (MK chuckles.) Unbelievable, yeah?

MK: So who cooked?

RU: My dad was the cook. Don't ask me where he learned. He was the cook. We also had another cook, Ben. You know, they had other cooks because Dad couldn't stay there all the time. Because he would go and set up the restaurant about four o'clock in the morning, I think. So he would come back about two o'clock, take a nap, and then he'll go back to work again.

MK: How long were the hours of this restaurant?

RU: Long because at one time, they would even catch the midnight shift. You know the stevedores? They would come in midnight so their hours were long. Mom was *nebosuke* so she went late. She went to work about maybe eight o'clock or seven o'clock. That's late. But she didn't come home for a nap. Dad would come home for a nap and then go back.

MK: Again, it was your mom and your dad running the restaurant.

RU: That was completely Mom and Dad.

MK: Then there was another cook.

RU: Yeah, always another. We had a dishwasher, we had waitresses working. My brothers, on their off days on Saturday, did dishwashing. If dishwasher didn't show up, they did the dishwashing. My older brother did some fry cook. He baked the pies. I was in the back washing glasses. During the war they would have baskets of utensils. They'd throw it on the table, and we would wipe it, put all the forks and knives on one spot. Later on, when I was about seventh, eighth, ninth grade, I would wait on the table. That's why I remember the prices.

MK: The workers, were they relatives too . . .

RU: No.

MK: . . . or outsiders?

- RU: Yeah. Maybe once in a while we would have relatives working if they needed a job. I remember one of my relatives was a secretary, but after work she would come to the restaurant to do waitress work and whatnot.
- MK: You mentioned that your brothers and yourself helped out at the restaurant. Were there other siblings that also helped out?
- RU: No, just my two brothers and I. My sister who's four years younger than me did a little bit but not much at that time we gave up. Yeah.
- MK: With your parents so busy with Lucky Grill, who actually took care of all these kids at home?
- RU: Okay. When I was about third grade, I was home. You won't believe it. Third grade, I was cooking rice. I would make corned beef onion—peasant food—corned beef onion like that and feed my siblings. Every night I would have the rice cooked. We didn't have rice cooker so I would be reading at the table, and I would burn the rice just about every night. (MK laughs.) My aunt who lived with us would have a fit. My mom, she would scold but not too much. But my aunt was the one that really had the fit. My dad says, "Oh, burnt rice is good for the stomach." (MK laughs.) He was a reader. He likes to read so I guess he could empathize with me.
- MK: So when you were very little, your grandparents kind of helped out with the childcare?
- RU: Yeah, and then left . . .
- MK: Till they left for Japan.
- RU: Right. When they left for Japan, I was only in maybe second grade or so. We lived next to Kauluwela School, so as soon as the bell rang, we would dash out, and we would make it in time because we were right next. Our yard was only divided by a fence, wooden fence. So we had one fence, so that just move the fence and then. . . . (MK laughs.)
- MK: I also know that the time that your family had Lucky Grill, your family also had Choice Inn and U.S. Café. There was a little overlap?
- RU: No, there were no overlap between Choice Inn and Lucky Grill. But I know Lucky Grill and U.S. Café was right opposite each other with two same owners.
- MK: How did they manage that?
- RU: I don't know why. It started with my grandfather. I don't know why they had bought two restaurant opposite of each other, but they both made money during the war. Really did well. If the war didn't come, I don't know if they would have done well. I don't know, but the two was there. I remember Lucky Grill being open late at night. Real late. They would catch that last shift of stevedore people because it was close to the docks. I don't remember about U.S. Café, how long it was open.
- I don't know how they managed before that but I remember my uncle being across the street and us being at Lucky Grill. That was not the only two restaurant. Right next was Owl Café. I don't know who owned that Owl Café, but it was—I don't know if it was liquor—but they had a bar that served food, and in the back was bill. . . . What do you call that?

- MK: Oh, billiards hall. A pool hall?
- RU: A pool house in the back. If you face Lucky Grill, to the left was another pool hall owned by Chinese people.
- MK: So, there was competition? You had U.S. Café, Lucky Grill, Owl Café.
- RU: In the back of Owl Café, same owners, pool hall. To the left of us was another pool hall.
- MK: Were there any other businesses in that area?
- RU: Yes. All along Hotel Street, you had restaurants, too. There were other restaurants. The pool hall took up to Hotel Street, I think was. But across the street was Lucky Grill, and there were other stores. I remember during the war they had arcades, little souvenir shops like that.
- MK: You were mentioning that the restaurants did well during the war.
- RU: Yeah.
- MK: How well? How did you know that they were doing well?
- RU: I know they were doing well because my uncle built his home, and he built apartments. One big apartment unit. He also offered to pay my dad back years afterwards. So he must have done well. I know my dad folks did well because they had apartments, invested in apartments.
- MK: I noticed other restaurant families not only had their restaurants, but like yours, got into real estate.
- RU: The Oroku people, all. Yeah. They helped each other out. Like the Teruya family came over, and Dad encouraged them. They advised, and they helped, and gave encouragement. So, most of them, all of them have apartments that went into business.
- MK: How about in terms of training other Oroku people to get into the restaurant business? Did your parents ever employ or train other Oroku?
- RU: Sam Uyehara said he worked for my father, which I didn't know. But he's the one that said when he first came that he worked for my dad.
- MK: He's the one who eventually got involved with the Pottery . . .
- RU: Pottery, yeah. Before that, he was chef at all different Waikīkī restaurants. So they went into that kind of work, too, and later on he had that outfit. Now, Sam came later. He's one of those *kibei*. He was born there, taken back to Okinawa, raised there, and then came back. So when he speaks, he has a strong Okinawan accent. I don't know where I picked it up, but I can recognize the Okinawan accent. [If] somebody speaks Japanese, and they from Okinawa, I almost can always catch it. Because we went to Wisteria to have dinner not too long ago now. I told my son, our waitress came from Okinawa.

END OF SIDE ONE

SIDE TWO

MK: We were just talking about Okinawan restaurants just getting into apartment ownership.

RU: My maternal grandfather already had apartments. So I know my parents learned from him. Except the one on Liliha Street was confiscated. They didn't get anything for that. There was one on Vineyard Street that was in Mom's name, so that was saved. So when the government made the freeway, they were compensated for it.

When my two uncles came back, my dad and mom made sure that half ownership went to the two boys. In fact, for the longest time it was under my parents' name. I know my dad used to get upset with the two brothers because he said for them, they got to get the ownership straightened out because they were old, and they might go anytime, and the ownership was only in their name. You don't know what might happen. So they finally got that cleared and had it in their name.

So my maternal grandfather already had invested. I'm sure he was one of the earlier immigrants. Not the earliest, but early. In fact, probably before my dad came as *yobiyose*.

MK: I was wondering since your maternal grandparents were into restaurant ownership, and bar ownership, and apartment ownership early on, would you know who they associated with? Who would kind of encourage that kind of entrepreneurship?

RU: As I said, my maternal grandfather left a good example, so that's the only person that I could think of that my parents learned. Of course, they already had their own business. I think that opened the way for my parents. That's the only thing.

MK: I was wondering, how long did your parents own U.S. Café and Lucky Grill?

RU: U.S. Café was given to my uncle. Then after that, my aunty Tsune took over. She had combination restaurant bar there at U.S. Café. I don't know when she gave it up because for the longest time, for about two or three years, it was closed, but she was still paying rent for that place.

Lucky Grill. . . . In '51, I went away to college, so soon after that, by '52 they gave up Lucky Grill because there were new leases coming up, and plus Liberty House was coming in. So, by '52 I think my parents were out of it, or somewhere around there.

MK: Would you know why your parents did not continue in other restaurant ventures after that?

RU: Yeah, I think they were too old by then because Dad was what? Dad was already in the fifties, fifty-three, somewhere around there. So I guess he didn't want to venture into another restaurant. Not only that, they had so much work to do with the apartments.

MK: That kept them . . .

RU: Busy. Kept them busy.

MK: Maintaining?

RU: Because Dad did everything. He was the painter, he was the plumber, he did simple electric work, yardman. So they had enough.

- MK: I don't know if they ever shared their thoughts with you, but what did they think about having been in the restaurant business, or did they ever comment about—did they like having restaurants and bars, or how hard the work was? Did they ever express their feelings about their businesses?
- RU: Well, I know this much. He did say the environment in owning a bar wasn't that good. Restaurant was all right, but hard work. Funny, in all our years of growing up, he never really encouraged us to go into the restaurant business. Everything was geared into raising us so that we would have a good education. There was no doubt in our minds that we would go to college. It was not a choice whether are we going to college, are we going to school after high school or not? It was understood we would go. My dad did mention that we should be very thankful to my mother who said that the females would also be educated as well as the boys. So my sisters, we all went to—I mean, there were no ifs and buts. We knew we were going, and we knew we would be supported through school. We never thought that we would have to work [straight out of high school].
- MK: For your own life then, I know you mentioned you went to St. Elizabeth's Kindergarten.
- RU: Yeah, and I went to Central Intermediate School, then after that I went to the [St. Andrew's] Priory. From ninth grade I went to the Priory. All of us girls went to the Priory except the last girl. She didn't want to go. She went to Roosevelt [High School]. (MK laughs.) She refused to go to the Priory.
- MK: Did all of you also go to college as intended?
- RU: Yes, all us girls went. I think out of the four girls, two have their master's and two of us don't. Myself, and my second to the last one, we don't have our master's. But the other two have their master's in education, although the youngest is working for the federal government.
- MK: So you attended Northern Colorado, graduating in 1954. And after that, where did you teach?
- RU: I taught at Hilo High School my first year. My second year, I was at Castle High School. From my third year I was at Farrington [High School] until I retired.
- MK: When did you retire?
- RU: I retired in '88. I remember that so clearly. By that time my parents were old so I had to retire and take care of them.
- MK: When you reflect on your life, what are your thoughts about the restaurant and bar business?
- RU: What are my thoughts? I have good thoughts. Working in a restaurant was—we were only little so we did things like washing glasses, drying the utensils. Later on I waited on table, but I didn't find it hard work. I didn't think I was deprived or overworked or anything. Maybe, too, it's because I see my parents working hard. Today, they say you have to spend time with the children. You can't deprive them of this and that. But we didn't feel deprived. Everybody was in the same boat anyhow. All of the parents were all working hard. We didn't feel anything.

In fact, when I look back I feel I really had a nice life. Almost like saying that I have a silver spoon in my mouth because I didn't have to worry about food, clothing. I went to college without thinking or worrying about funds coming in. I just concentrated on going to school. I really had a nice life. Very fortunate, I have a nice partner. We have the same philosophy, raising our children, make sure they have a good education. I enjoyed my job thoroughly. In fact, I really hated to leave it in '88 when I had to leave it. I'm really, really, really fortunate. My brothers and sisters, really fortunate.

MK: Right now, how many children do you have?

RU: I have three children.

MK: They're all . . .

RU: They're dentists. And I always tell them they're very thankful to their grandparents because if it weren't for them, they wouldn't be where they are because then we wouldn't be educated. We wouldn't be able to afford to send them to school. So it all stems from the issei. They really suffered and deprived themselves. They really did, you know, deprive themselves. But then, when I think about it, they did it so graciously. They didn't complain. They were happy. They were happy people, as I see. The social events were with people they were comfortable with. They made outside friends. I remember a lot of my mother's contacts in business, apartment. They would come New Year's Day, invited them to have food with us. We were very fortunate. We met nice people. Always, even now, we met nice people. We're really lucky. I haven't had to worry about anything. Nothing. We have everything to be thankful for.

As far as my parents, my father is concerned, he's happy he became an American citizen. He says if it weren't for America and Hawai'i, he wouldn't have the things he had. He couldn't have helped his brothers and sister in the old country. Isseis were happy people, really were. You don't hear them complaining.

MK: So they were hardworking . . .

RU: Real humble, compassionate. When anything happens, they don't think about suing. They don't think about going on welfare. They feel that somehow they can eke it out. They were hardworking, honest people.

MK: I'm going to end the interview here then.

RU: Okay, fine.

END OF INTERVIEW

The Oroku, Okinawa Connection: Local-style Restaurants in Hawai'i

**Center for Oral History
Social Science Research Institute
University of Hawai'i at Mānoa**

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